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Roman and Late Antique wine production in the Eastern Mediterranean

Emlyn Dodd, *Roman and Late Antique wine production in the Eastern Mediterranean: a comparative archaeological study at Antiochia ad Cragum (Turkey) and Delos (Greece)*. Archaeopress Roman archaeology, 63. Oxford: Archaeopress, 2020. Pp. viii, 207; 42 p. of plates. ISBN 9781789694024 £36.00.

Review by

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Developed on the basis of his doctoral thesis, Emlyn Dodd’s monograph is a major contribution to the archaeology of wine production in the Roman and Late Antique East, both in content and methodology.^[1] The book starts with a solid introductory chapter (Part 1, pp. 3-22), in which the author first presents the argument and approach of his study. Dodd makes a sound case for choosing Antiochia ad Cragum in Turkey (a recently found yet unstudied press installation that remains the sole fully excavated example of its kind in Rough Cilicia) and Delos in Greece (an accessible multi-press dataset urgently in need of a more detailed and interdisciplinary study) as two contexts with great potential to update and expand our knowledge of viticultural production in the Eastern Mediterranean. While the value of ethnographic approaches in archaeology remains debated, Dodd intelligently (and rightly) applies the method here, not to look for direct analogies between ancient and contemporary cultures, but as a heuristic tool to explicate agricultural techniques and production processes. This is a lucid vision, and one expertly placed against the background of succinct overviews of both the history of research and the relevant ancient textual sources.

His first case study, Antiochia ad Cragum (Part 2, pp. 25-71), is above all a blueprint of how a meticulously detailed (ethno)archaeological analysis of a carefully selected context can contribute significantly to our understanding of ancient press functioning and use-life. From highlighting the advantages of the adjacent temple structure — which shaded the workers during the vintage and then maintained temperatures adequate for fermentation — to attentively fusing architectural, technical and ceramic evidence for dating (late 4th to late 6th century AD), to offering tentative reconstructions of production and fermentation processes on the basis of the structural evidence, Dodd offers by far one of the most insightful discussions of a single antique press installation to date. The author’s choice of such an intensive, site-focused approach over a more comprehensive and systematic treatment of all press evidence in the region obviously has its drawbacks (mainly with regard to the wider validity and regional contextualization of his interpretations), but these do not outweigh the added value of a first-time analysis of an excavated installation to our existing knowledge on viticulture (based on texts, amphorae and field survey data) in Rough Cilicia.^[2]

The case study of Delos (Part 3, pp. 75-132) is another matter entirely, as — unlike the press at Antiochia ad Cragum — the island’s press installations have been the subject of intense study and debate since the 1980s.^[3] Still, many standing interpretations are now outdated, while the existing documentation often lacks detail and clear (photographic) illustration, and here Dodd’s work fills a major lacuna. His attentive and holistic reconsideration of six (out of eight known) wineries — following a similar analytical pathway as with Antiochia ad Cragum — results in an exemplary dossier of wine production on 4th-6th century AD Delos, and thus highlights the role of the island as an important viticultural centre during the rise of Christianity in the Late Antique East. This view is strengthened much by an expert effort in crop estimation and potential production (akin to the approach introduced by this reviewer^[4]). While such exercises remain in large part probabilistic, Dodd’s attempt shows (again) how they can meaningfully deepen our insight into ancient (wine) economies.

The richness of Dodd’s comparative study, however, lies especially in the numerous technical and spatial aspects of ancient wineries discussed throughout the book (summarized in a concluding chapter, pp. 135-139), and two of them deserve special mention here. First, the noted absence of separate storage (and fermentation) facilities at both Antiochia ad Cragum and Delos (pp. 45, 56-59, 115) is a trait that is coming to be recognized as a kind of general feature of Late Antique winemaking in the Eastern Mediterranean,^[5] and this raises the important issue of the duration of in-vat fermentation. Dodd considers two possibilities: either the must was left in the collection vat during primary fermentation (5 to 7 days) and then transferred into (still to be discovered) *dolia* or amphorae in cellars for secondary fermentation (6 to 8 eight weeks) and storage (up to 6 months); or the must was directly transferred into *dolia* or amphorae (after sediment deposition in the vats) and remained there during the entire fermentation and aging process. As Dodd rightly notes (p. 58), this obviously impacts the number of press operations that could be carried out over a vintage season in each installation, and thus the amount of wine that could be produced annually. Add to this a real third possibility, that the must remained in the initial vat for the entire period of 6 months (not entertained by Dodd), and one starts to wonder whether such extended in-vat fermentation strategies indeed (in part) lie behind the landscapes dotted with small wineries so typical for the Late Antique East (p. 116).

Second, Antiochia and Delos are both prime examples of the widespread but still poorly understood phenomenon of “re-ruralisation” of urban areas in the Late Antique West and East, a process characterized by the installation of agricultural infrastructure (such as presses) in abandoned or marginalized zones of Roman towns, often accompanied by the reuse and recycling of older architecture. While such developments clearly attest to shifting accents in the use of urban space (pp. 131-132), they are also an expression of a profoundly changing economic mentality (p. 71), often mistakenly associated with economic difficulties (from a modern point of view), but instead deeply rooted in a long-standing ‘ancient’ sense of economic rationality.^[6] Dodd’s study is again a case in point, and an important step forward in the debate.

In the end, with some 150 pages of detailed description, analysis and interpretation, accompanied by 30 figures and 42 plates — most of them in colour — this study is a rich source of information for anyone interested in wine production and press technology in the Late Roman, Late Antique and Byzantine Mediterranean, and a fine achievement by a promising young scholar in the field.

Notes

^[1] See now also E. Dodd. “Late Roman viticulture in Rough Cilicia: an unusual wine-press at Antiochia ad Cragum.” *JRA* 33 (2020) 467-482.

^[2] See in particular U. Aydinoglu and E. Aklac. “Rock-cut wine presses in Rough Cilicia.” *Olba* 16 (2008) 277-290; M. Decker. “The wine trade of Cilicia in Late Antiquity.” *ARAM* 17 (2005) 51-59; N.K. Rauh, M.J. Dillon, C. Dore, R. Rothaus and M. Korsholm. “Viticulture, oleoculture and economic development in Roman Rough Cilicia.” *Münsterische Beiträge zur antiken Handelsgeschichte* XXV.1 (2006) 49-98; and N.K. Rauh and K.W. Slane. “Possible amphora kiln sites in W Rough Cilicia.” *JRA* 13 (2000) 319-330.

^[3] Mainly discussed in J.P. Brun. “Laudatissimum fuit antiquitus in Delo insula: La maison IB du Quartier du stade et la production des parfums à Délos.” *BCH* 123.1 (1999) 87-155; P. Bruneau. “Deliaca.” *BCH* 111.1 (1987) 313-342; P. Bruneau and P. Fraisse. “Un pressoir à vin à Délos.” *BCH* 105.1 (1981) 127-153; “Pressoirs déliens.” *BCH* 108.2 (1984) 713-730; and M. Brunet. “Vin local et vin de cru, les exemples de Délos et de Thasos.” In M.-C. Amouretti and J.P. Brun (eds.), *La production du vin et de l’huile en Méditerranée* (BCH Supplément XXVI). Athens: Ecole Française d’Athènes. 1993: 202-212.

^[4] Also applied to Antiochia ad Cragum earlier in the book. Cf. D. Van Limbergen. “Figuring out the balance between intra-regional consumption and extra-regional export of wine and olive oil in Late Antique northern Syria.” In A. Diler, K. Senol and U. Aydinoglu (eds.), *Olive Oil and Wine Production in Eastern Mediterranean during Antiquity, International Symposium Proceedings 17-19 November 2011, Urla – Turkey*. Izmir: Ege University Press. 2015: 169-190.

^[5] Not one storage facility, for example, is known for Northern Syria, where thousands of small, rock-cut presses were making wine for local consumption and export in the 4th-8th century AD (see most recently D. Van Limbergen. “Changing perspectives on roller presses in Late Antique Northern Syria.” *Syria* 94 (2017) 307-323, with references).

^[6] For an illustration of the practice in Roman Italy, see J.C. Fant, B. Russell and S.J. Barker. “Marble use and reuse at Pompeii and Herculaneum: the evidence from the bars.” *PBSR* 81 (2013) 181-209; see also D. Van Limbergen. “Vinum Picenum and Oliva Picena II. Further thoughts on wine and oil presses in central Adriatic Italy.” *BABesch* 94 (2019) 97-126.

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